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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Friday, April 25, 1941

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "TURNIP GREENS AND OTHER KINDS." Information from the Bureaus of Plant Industry and Home Economics, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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Spinning tops for small boys,-- and turnip tops for Congressmen,-- seem to appear with mysterious suddenness in Washington, D. C. in the springtime, so I'm told. I understand there's a restaurant over near the Capitol that features turnip greens every spring. And Congressmen and Senators from districts where these greens are favorite "garden sass" flock to this restaurant for lunch when turnip greens are on the menu.

Be that as it may, Americans in all parts of the country in recent years seem to be eating not only turnip greens, but more of other leafy green vegetables. The leafy green vegetables are classed among the protective foods by nutritionists. Here's what the Bureau of Home Economics says in regard to their food values:

"Leafy, green vegetables are rich in both iron and vitamin A. The thinner and greener the leaf, the richer they are in both. Many of the greens are also rich in calcium. Green leaves are also an excellent source of vitamin G, and have considerable amounts of vitamins C and B_1, and they contribute bulk or roughage, needed by most people in normal health."

In city markets you can buy such standbys as turnip greens and spinach, kale, collards, mustard greens, beet tops, and commercially grown dandelion. Plant scientists have helped to improve many of the familiar garden greens, or produce new varieties suitable for commercial handling. For example, those turnip greens featured in the Washington restaurant are probably the "seven-top" variety, which has been developed so that it goes chiefly to tops and has very small roots.

Again, sprouting broccoli was a comparative luxury ten years ago. Now it's popular and fairly cheap as a result of plant scientists' work. Today's housewife can also buy Chinese cabbage, Swiss chard, and, towards summer, New Zealand spinach. These are relative newcomers in public markets, although some of them have been grown for many years in home gardens.

Most of us eat some salad greens raw,--lettuce, escarole, endive, or romaine. In that form they give us the most vitamins and minerals, since nothing is lost in the cooking water. But for variety, and with very little loss, you can wilt lettuce and other salad plants and serve them hot like other greens. And vice-versa,-- you can chop and add uncooked spinach and other green leaves to vegetable salads just before you serve. Just be careful not to let the chopped leaves stand, or you will lose vitamin values.

Many of the wild plants that you will regard as weeds later on are delicious greens right now, while they are tender and delicate in flavor. Some of the best ones to hunt out in fields and meadows are: dandelion greens, mustard, lamb's quarters, sorrel, field cress, purslane, corn salad and poke shoots. Never use poke roots,-- they are poisonous.

Any of these can be cooked alone, or blended with one or two other greens of about the same tenderness. You can use both wild and garden-grown greens together. Good blends are beet and turnip tops, field cress and spinach, or corn salad and mustard greens. Use more of the milder greens and less of the pungent ones in these mixtures. Experiment a little until you get a blend the family likes.

Prepare wild greens just as you do any others. You can cook them in a very small amount of water, or pan them. But first, of course, wash them thoroughly in 4 or 5 waters to get rid of grit or sand. Lift the leaves out of the water each time so as to let the sand sink to the bottom of the pan.

Cook any kind of greens quickly, and in as little water as possible. Often the drops that cling to the leaves from the last washing will give enough moisture to start the steam. Salt lightly. Cover the pan at first, and use a low fire. Cook more rapidly as steam forms, and finish cooking without a lid, to keep the good green color. Never add soda. Soda increases the destruction of vitamins. Long boiling or much stirring while the greens are cooking may also increase the vitamin loss. Sieving while hot has the same effect.

In 5 to 10 minutes most greens will be wilted and tender. Drain and chop them. Plan to make some use of the "pot likker" that is drained off, because of the vitamins and minerals dissolved in it. Season the chopped greens with a fat of some kind, salt, and pepper. If the family likes vinegar or lemon juice on greens, add that at the table. The fat may be just cream, or butter or margarine, or bacon or ham fat, with bits of bacon or ham sprinkled over the greens. Or it may be salt pork, or salad oil.

Panning is another good way to cook some greens. For instance, chop kale before you cook it, melt some fat in a skillet, add the chopped green leaves, cover, and cook slowly for 15 or 20 minutes, or until the greens are tender. It takes kale a little longer time to cook than most other greens. Sprinkle a little flour over the greens, mix well, and then pour in some milk or cream and cook a little longer. Season with salt and pepper. The panned greens have much of the food value and flavor of the vegetable as well as that of the milk.

The traditional hard-cooked egg that often garnishes a dish of spinach can be used for any greens. It can be more than a mere decoration, if you hard-cook enough eggs so that everyone may have a half or a whole egg.

If you can't use greens at once when you bring them into the house, wash them thoroughly and put them in a covered container in a cold place. Don't leave them soaking in water.

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